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DE RUEHKU #0925/01 0771251
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 181251Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3531
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000925

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STATE FOR NEA/ARP (DBERNS), NEA/PPD (PAGNEW, CWHITTLESEY), R, ECA
(DPOWELL)

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: FREEDOM AGENDA: EMBASSY'S INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
CELEBRATION APPLAUDS ACHIEVEMENTS OF KUWAITI WOMEN

11. Summary: The Embassy hosted a luncheon for 50 Kuwaiti women leaders on Sunday, March 12, 2006, at the Ambassador's Residence in celebration of International Women's Day. Comprised of high-ranking female Kuwaitis, the guest list included government officials, business executives, educators, human rights activists, writers, lawyers, renowned artists, presidents of two private universities, and journalists, as well as NGO leaders. The garden-side luncheon was held to recognize women's achievements worldwide, with an emphasis on the political participation of American women and the 2005 decision to grant Kuwaiti women suffrage. Dr. Rasha Al-Sabah, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, member of the ruling family, a U.S. university graduate and a prominent academic, was the keynote speaker and guest of honor. During her remarks, she expressed deep appreciation for U.S. support during the 40-year struggle for Kuwaiti women to receive full political rights and quipped, "If there's a hard job to be done, give it to a Kuwaiti woman." End summary.

Honoring Women's Triumphs

12. Fifty Kuwaiti women leaders forming a broad cross-section of Kuwaiti society assembled under a tent in the garden of the Ambassador's residence on the afternoon of March 12, 2006, to commemorate women's achievements in Kuwait and learn from the U.S. experience. Decorated in blue and white, the tables, chairs, and tent matched the color scheme of the Kuwaiti women's campaign for full political rights. The year 2005 had been especially significant to Kuwaiti women, because it epitomized their efforts to achieve full political participation following a prolonged struggle of four decades. The Ambassador greeted guests and congratulated them on victories achieved in recent years. He acknowledged Kuwaiti women's contributions to their country in the areas of democratization, development, and economic growth.

Acknowledging American Women's Achievements

13. The PAO delivered opening remarks outlining American women's historical and recent contributions in political, business, and social fields as an inspiration to women worldwide and commended Kuwaiti women on their newly earned victories in political and social arenas. She noted, "As women, we have made our countries stronger and better, we have improved our communities and played a vital role in achieving justice and people's rights. In the U.S., many notable women have helped shape our democratic society and served as role models for young women who came after them who wanted to make a difference." She concluded saying that "in recent history, Dr. Condoleezza Rice took up the same torch and became Secretary of State in 2005. Dr. Rice's accomplishments in both

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academia and public service are a testament to how far American women have progressed."

¶4. Next, Undersecretary of Higher Education, Dr. Rasha Al-Sabah, an active and well-regarded graduate of Yale University, delivered a rousing speech. She outlined the history of Kuwaiti women's struggle for equality, recommended further development of Kuwaiti women leaders, and called for continued political action through voting in the pending 2007 elections and running candidates for office. She stated, "The real battle for Kuwaiti women has just begun and women have to begin to hone their skills in campaigning and to convince people that they have reached political maturity." Dr. Al-Sabah added, "To get our political rights is innate in our nature. Kuwaiti women are present in all spheres of life, have proven their skills and capabilities, and thus deserve to go much further, because they have struggled to get their political rights."

The Undersecretary recounted the parliamentary rejection of the May 16, 1999 decree by the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah granting women their political rights and how on the same date in 2005 the "dream of women was realized" when Parliament approved a law giving women full political rights. She further hailed the appointment of Kuwait's first female minister, Dr. Masouma Al-Mubarak. (May 16 was the parliamentary vote. Dr. Masouma became minister in June.) She concluded by calling Kuwaiti women pioneers, stating, "Kuwaiti women should not settle for anything less than the best" and encouraged them not to accept "skimmed milk" but to go for "full cream," noting that Kuwaiti women deserve full equality with men.

Joining Forces

¶5. Invitees expressed appreciation for the opportunity to meet and observe this special day together. One Kuwaiti guest stated, "We feel embarrassed that we as women, NGO leaders, and activists did not do this occasion justice. However, thanks to the U.S. Embassy,

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we were able to acknowledge and celebrate International Women's Day." Other guests commented that the event was ideal for bringing together members of the highly segmented Kuwaiti women's movement, many of whom otherwise would not cross paths, due to stratification along family, professional, and political lines.

Publicizing the Day

¶6. The event received outstanding press coverage in all five Arabic and three English language Kuwaiti daily newspapers. Articles featuring half-page color photos of the Ambassador, Mrs. LeBaron, and Dr. Al-Sabah as well as other key guests filled pages of the newspapers the following day. Additional coverage was posted on the Embassy's Internet site and the website of the official Kuwaiti News Agency (KUNA). In addition, a Kuwaiti social magazine has expressed interest in publishing a report about the gathering in its monthly publication.

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